Some Recollections of an Interviewer

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discovery he was mad clean through. He threw the gift on the floor and stamped on it. And he never forgave those who were concerned in the hoax. Perhaps he is more vindictive toward me because I did not deny that the soap pipe invention was mine."

My interview with President Harrison turned out to be a failure, although it was undertaken at my own suggestion at a time when matters were quiet and because I had had the honor of meeting him and his family in Indianapolis and had danced once or twice with his daughter, Mrs. McKee. These circumstances may have helped to open the door of the White House for me but they did not melt the Presidential ice when I got inside.

How different was the wholesome and homely chat I once had with the veteran author William D. Howells, the memory of it coming up right here because, as it seemed to me, there were physical resemblances between him and Mr. Harrison. The novelist was living at the Gainesborough studios on West Fifty-ninth street and I fix the time by the book which he autographed and gave me. It was "A Boys' Town" and had just been published.

Mr. Howells talked about anything that came into his head: American letters, Italy when he lived there as Consul, Italy revisited, Central Park which he overlooked from his great studio window, and the inconsistencies of the menu as it was written nightly in the restaurant on the first floor of the building. It was all spoken in a sweet, slow speech, very agreeable to listen to, but the impression it has left is that he never committed himself to a very definite statement, all was conditional, he saw both sides or all around everything.

F. Marion Crawford, as another novel writer, but a very different spirit, enters by a natural transition. Although I met him several times in the charming *pied-a-terre* he had made for himself out of a loft in Fifth avenue, the interview itself had occurred twenty years before in his villa in Sorrento, Italy. That villa he had taken as the setting for one of his early novels, "To Leeward." He was not satisfied until he had taken me over it to show the rooms where poignant, passionate things had happened, and finally to the cave under the rocks that sprang up ruddy and perpendicular from the sounding sea where he kept his sailboat. In this grim and somber cave, noisy with the rush and splash of water, Crawford reacted the thrilling scene which is the crisis of the story.

Mansfield and Irving.

In the fall of the same year after I had come home I met Richard Mansfield, who was then preparing to put all his undoubted talents to the test by playing *Richard III.*, his first Shakespearean production. His *Baron Chevriel* and *Prince Karl* already had made for him a great name but there were persons who believed that his power in these modern parts would not help him to a higher theatrical dignity. I don't believe Mansfield shared these doubts, but when I saw him for the first time in private life—it was at the Croisic, an apartment house that has disappeared—he was manifestly nervous, apprehensive and ill at ease. Feeling like this he was not apt to make a good subject for an interview. And he did not.

Mansfield could be suave and ultra polite, as I discovered in subsequent meetings, but the clever thing, and the sharp thing, always lay near the surface of his utterance. He said it, too, often when it was impolitic. When he first met the company which had been engaged to support him in "Cyrano de Bergerac" I stood on the stage not far from the *Roxane* of the company, Miss Margaret Anglin, who sat on a box waiting for rehearsal to begin. Mansfield had not spoken to her, not indeed to anybody. He walked back and forth, staring at Miss Anglin harder every time he passed her. Finally he stopped and said:

"*Roxane*, as Rostand pictured her, was a *beautiful* woman!"

"Yes," quickly replied Miss Anglin, "and as Rostand pictures *Cyrano* he was the soul of courtesy!"

But Mansfield was a sick man then, although neither he nor his doctors knew the nature of his fatal malady, and much of his harsh speech and of his often very bad manners must be attributed to this and forgiven. Yet it is safe to say that nobody who ever came under the lash of his tongue will ever forget this famous actor.

Meeting Sir Henry.

If I call my brief contacts with Mr. Mansfield uncomfortable I need a stronger word when I come to speak of Sir Henry Irving. He had arrived at the title when he came over here for the last time and opened in a piece by Sardou, "Dante," written to the Englishman's order. I was writing dramatic criticism on a newspaper that is still going strong, and like all earnest and inexperienced critics I worked very hard over my little pieces. "Dante," you may be sure, was a big job for me to review and I studied the encyclopedias until I could talk about the "Divina Commedia" as if I had written it. I did write a column, filled with much unnecessary information and had it in type before the opening.

Sir Henry looked the part to perfection but there was no making anything of the play by any degree of genius because it was a melodramatic farrago. I went to my office at midnight and killed my beautiful article, then wrote a line or two saying the play was "rotten."

That brought about my interview with Sir Henry without my solicitation.

Miss Laura Burt, a talented American who carried the most melodramatic role in the piece, happened to be present when Irving read aloud in a tone of cold disgust this ribald critique, and glancing at the paper she said:

"I know the man who writes drama for that sheet."

In this way Sir Henry became possessed of my name and he wrote me a note inviting me to go to see him. I went, of course, and I am not yet sorry I did, for the great actor talked to me in his halting speech for half an hour. The silliness of pretending to knowledge that one hasn't got was one of his themes, and another was the crime of treating with indignity a tremendous literary name. I might have retorted that Sardou had shown me the way in both cases but I didn't, and while it was rather a bad half hour it closed friendly enough.

Reporters of New York city papers at the time Grover Cleveland on completing his term as President came to New York to live will remember how almost impossible it was to interview him. They will remember also that the city editors of these papers were in the habit of giving out assignments on every conceivable subject with the remark:

"See what Grover Cleveland has to say about this."

Just as simple as that. And it was the ex-President's habit to stare rudely at his questioner—whenever a questioner got at him, which was rarely—and refuse to say a word. This sphinxlike silence protected him; nobody dared quote when not a single word had been vouchsafed.

Too Much Cleveland.

The Grover Cleveland "interview" of those days became a joke and foisted its name on any interview which proved unfruitful. Therefore I was never more surprised when, a political situation having arisen, my city editor gave me instructions to go to Mr. Cleveland, at his home in Princeton, for his views about it. I went, of course, but thought of the trip as a simple day's outing.

To my surprise, Mr. Cleveland received me affably in the quaint, delightful Colonial house in Princeton which he had bought as a home for his family. For but a few minutes the ex-President left his caller to stare at the portrait of Mrs. Cleveland, which was the chief ornament of the parlor, a real parlor, and then he walked in and asked the purpose of the visit.

Mr. Cleveland listened in silence and then said:

"I will answer these questions. Meanwhile would it interest you to walk about in my somewhat narrow grounds?"

Whether it would or not, I found myself wandering about in them and trying to kill time. It did not seem that I would have more than half an hour of this murderous business.

But I reckoned without the ex-President. Noon came, then 1 o'clock, at which hour a servant sought me out and invited me to have luncheon. This was served in a small dining room in solitary state. After it I wandered along the formal paths of the garden again, up and down and back and forth, over and over again.

At length, when the sun dial had quit registering for the day, the heavy and stately figure of Mr. Cleveland was seen moving slowly down the path. He carried a bulky manuscript in his hand. This he gave to his "interviewer" with the remark:

"Here, I believe, are the answers to your questions."

They were in truth full and complete answers, so many and so full as to constitute in the newspaper office an embarrassment of riches.

Croker Spoils a "Beat."

But of all the singular experiences in the line of interviewing which I am able to recall that with Richard Croker, "boss" of Tammany Hall, given at a time when the society went down to defeat, ranks as the oddest.

Croker, as is very well known, was like Napoleon I. in one respect (only one). He wasn't talkative when things were going his way, but he became a veritable chatterbox when they weren't. On the occasion in question he was seen at the Democratic Club house on Fifth avenue at about 5 o'clock on the eve of the election. All he was asked to do was to make a forecast. He made one, the only one he had indulged in for this campaign, and it was a very full and rambling forecast.

When he finished he said that he would like me to write out what he had said and send the article upstairs to him. I did this and sent up the finished story about 7 o'clock. Then I sat down to wait for Mr. Croker's vise.

I waited till 8 o'clock. Not a sign from the upper floors of the club house. I waited half an hour longer, seeing dinner and every other plan going by the board.

A 9 o'clock I summoned a page and sent him upstairs to see if Mr. Croker had finished with the article. The boy went and never reappeared.

The clock struck 10.

"Is Mr. Croker still in the house?" I asked the clerk at the desk. Oh, yes, Mr. Croker was upstairs and couldn't be disturbed.

At 11.30 the article was given back and I carried it to the editor in a mood of silent rage. However, it was a "beat," an exclusive expression from the Tammany chief, and that must serve as consolation for lost time.

And next day every paper in the city came out with exactly the same article. The Tammany chief had mimeographed the interview and served everybody alike!

Greenland's First Novel

GREENLAND has produced its first native novel in the native tongue. The author is Matthias Storck and his book bears the title, "Singnagtugap," which being interpreted means "A Greenlander's Dream." It has appeared in Danish as well as in the original.

This is creditable, for Greenland had to create a written language before any national literature could be born. The Greenland written language is an infant among tongues. It was born in 1721, when Paul Egede, son of the Danish missionary, Hans Egede, made the first attempts to form a written language out of the dialect spoken by the people. It was one of the Eskimo dialects, very rudimentary and used as spoken language only. Less than twenty years later Egede had sufficiently completed his work to bring out an alphabet book in the new Greenland tongue. Still later, thirty years at least, he translated the New Testament into this tongue. Other later missionaries, notably Peter Kragh, improved the language and translated other religious works for the Greenlanders to read. Kragh's chief work was a Greenland version of "Thomas a Kempis."

The first printing press in Greenland was the little hand press set up by J. C. Kleinschmidt, son of another missionary. He, too, worked to improve and enrich the language and translated many books. He had his first translations printed in London, but in 1851 he set up his press, printing his books himself. Ten years later competition appeared. Lars Moeller set up a rival printing establishment and issued the first native paper. Its name was *Aktuagagdliutet*, and it appeared first as a little magazine once a year. It is now a quarterly and very popular. It was the beginning of literary life in Greenland, for it was the first native product. The little magazine brought news and many translations. But it brought drawings by native artists and collections of the native folk poems. And it introduced secular literature from other countries to its readers. In its pages the Greenlanders first learned to know "Robinson Crusoe," the "Arabian Nights," and other classics.